CHEAP TRUTH

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EDITORIAL

radical, hard SF

seeing signs that something new is imminent—
new fiction from the bounty of new technology,
the perspectives opened up by contemporary science
fight back, using guerrilla tactics New information systems
fashion that new science fiction for the electronic age.

ICE CRACKS UP WITH '83 BEST OF THE YEAR

THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION FIRST ANNUAL COLLECTION, Gardner Dozois, ed., Bluejay, $9.95.

With this volume, Bluejay Books has delivered a stinging duellist's slap to the slack jowls of the anthology market. Bluejay's daring must be roundly applauded and they've come through with a real bug-crusher in this 575-page colossus.

Veteran editor Gardner Dozois blithely ignores the stock list of Neb and Hugo nominees to give us work of genuine merit from the most esoteric of markets. The man's masochistic dedication to the genre -- he reads SF in truly industrial quantity -- has never been more in evidence. His opening Summation repays close reading for its quick-witted ideology and sagacious grasp of industry dynamics.

The book is remarkable for its lack of clunkers. Even the worst stories here can be read with a straight face. The best can stand with anything written in the past ten years. More importantly, they show an earnest effort by '80's writers to scrap old formulas and speak in a modern vocabulary.

Greg Bear serves as the exemplar. His two stories included here have won dual Nebulas, itself a very promising sign. As co-editor of the SFWA Forum, the man was in the heart of the beast, and his daring attempts to transcend his own limits are therefore doubly praiseworthy.

His bizarre OMNI story of '82, "Petra," showed something odd stirring in the Bear attic. With "Hardfought" and "Blood Music," the man has thrown restraint to the winds.

"Hardfought" may be thick with jargon and laden with annoying attempts at verse. But it burns with genuine visionary intensity and its Stapledonian daring arouses real wonder. This is what SF is about.

"Blood Music" has a ludicrous plot and has filed the serial numbers from Sturgeon's "Microcosmic God." But Bear knows what to borrow, and the ending goes for broke. Bear's reckless energy has made him a writer to watch -- and to emulate.

Efforts by more established writers show the effect of a real thaw. Silverberg's "Multiples" is one of his best in years: smooth, devastatingly plausible, a brilliant idea handled with great skill. Tanith Lee is at her unique best with "Nunc Dimittis," a dark fantasy that shimmers with necro-eroticism. R. A. Lafferty spryly tramples convention with a story from his splendid small-press collection, "Golden Gate." Lafferty has always been a cult figure. He will still be a cult figure a hundred years from now.

Particularly heartening are the efforts of the "'80's generation," listed by Dozois as Bear, Cadigan, Gibson, Kelly, Kennedy, Kessel, Murphy, Robinson, Shiner, Sterling, Swanwick, and Willis -- surely one of the oddest groupings ever. Seven have stories here -- the rest figure prominently in the Honorable Mentions.

If these heirs-designate were dropped into a strong magnetic field, Gibson, Shiner, Sterling, Cadigan, and Bear would immediately drift to one pole. Swanwick, Robinson, Kessel, Kelly, Murphy and Willis would take the other.

Leigh Kennedy goes her own goddamn way. Her story, "Her Furry Face," demonstrates Kennedy's unique style: low-key, determined prose combined with an unflinching and peculiar vision. Reading Leigh Kennedy is like having your housecat show up with a small dead pterodactyl in its jaws.

Pat Cadigan's "Nearly Departed" is a psi story, not overly burdened with technological literacy. But its tough-minded lack of sentiment keeps reader interest up.

Bruce Sterling's "Cicada Queen" shows this ambitious writer manfully wrestling with his complex Mechanist/Shaper future society. It should have been a novel, and apparently will be.

No review could be complete without a mention of Jack Dann's "Blind Shemmy." This story is so sharp-edged that it ought to be read with forceps.

Altogether, Dozois' collection is excellent, both for what it is and for what it promises. Its Summation and thorough list of Honorable Mentions are worth the price in themselves. Winter is over -- prepare for spring cleaning.

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CHEAP TRUTH 809-C West 12th Street, Austin, Texas USA 78701 Vincent Omniaveritas, editing. Todd Refinery, graphics. NOT COPYRIGHTED. Our special thanks this issue to Thomas C. Squire, C.B.E., Lecturer in Future Culture at The University of Texas at Austin. "Worthless But Not Valueless"

SF: A Rhapsody. After Swift

All Human Beings would be Rich,
So many scratch where all must itch;
Though few will ever find a Cure
Except through Crime or Luck; and your
Best chance for Wealth is to inherit.
For those who have no skill or merit
A Writer's Life holds most attraction -
Requiring neither Mind nor Action.
The hack chews shreds of Literacy
To nourish those less read than he
(Thus we define Democracy).
If even this prove uninviting,
There's always Science Fiction writing;
Or baser still, if this he scorns,
He'll churn out stuff on Unicorns,
Assured their is no Magazine
Can spot the difference between
A future possibility
And rankest ancient Phantasy.

The Muse of Dirty Laundry

The SF Field! O, sore disgrace!
Where Dunces fight for bottom Place,
All forced to exercise their Spleen,
They're in such odious Comp'ny seen,
Where every mental Deviation
Is praised as true Imagination.
If on Parnassus' top you sit,
You rarely bite, are often bit:
Conversely, in Parnassus' ditch,
There's nothing but to boast and bitch
As brother turns on savage brother
(E'en while they plagiarise each other)
As, writhing in low eminence,
They cannot make their Tales make sense.

The Muse of Flaming Rhetoric

These failures clog the lists of DAW,
Del Rey, Ace Books, Avon, and Tor,
Where copywriters gild their sins
With "Greater Tolkiens", "New LeGuins",
"Beats Arthur Clarke", "Equal to Niven"
- As if that awful thought were Heaven! -
Or "Starrier Wars"... And Sturgeon there,
Here Budrys, "Masterpiece" declare,
"Not to be missed...." Such feeble lies
Support a feebler enterprise
Of Royalties at 4%
Which scarcely serve to pay the rent
- Or keep a Mistress in a Tent! --
Yet still these hacks are over-paid!

The Muse of Bigger Royalties

Such fools will never make the grade.
They have no Style, no Spark, no Topic,
Their very Pains are Microscopic.
Although they holler for Attention
In Fanzine, LOCUS, and Convention,
With Asinine Insistence -
The World knows not of their Existence,
The World hears not their Lamentation,
And holds SF in... Detestation....